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Hawaii's defense role

The decision to revise former plans and retain Pacific Air Forces headquarters at Hickam Air Force Base is good news for Hawaii, and it indicates something about U.S. policy in the area today.

For Hawaii, it means keeping some jobs. The headquarters operation has been significantly reduced since the end of the Vietnam War. But at a time like this of high unemployment all jobs are valuable.

Beyond jobs, however, the Pentagon decision reflects the continuing significance of Hawaii as a natural command center, not just in location but in related operations and community support facilities.

The importance of defense spending should not be underestimated by anyone concerned about Hawaii's economy. Yet without minimizing it, the greater challenge is to capitalize on some of the same positive factors and make Hawaii a center for more nonmilitary Pacific area activities, economic and otherwise.

THE DECISION to keep Pacific Air Forces headquarters here comes against a background of changing U.S. military priorities in the region.

In his speech making the announcement, Air Force Secretary

Thomas Reed noted that the U.S. military presence in the Western Pacific is the smallest since 1950 before the Korean War broke out.

Most would not find that alarming. After our misguided effort in Vietnam, it may be natural and beneficial.

But it's also obvious there is a continuing role for U.S. military forces in the Pacific, judging by Soviet activity, the desires of Japan and other allies, and by U.S. national interests as a whole.

Reed pointed out that the phased withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from South Korea over the next five years is accompanied by a requirement that U.S. air support continue. That is the one area where North Korea has a strong superiority over the South, and for now it is the U.S. role to maintain a balance.

ALL IN ALL, we are in a period when, hopefully, the U.S. can retain a low military profile in the Pacific but one where our air and naval forces and military flexibility are still vital.

So it's beneficial for both Hawaii economy and the U.S. defense posture that the headquarters for such area-wide activity remain here in Hawaii.

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Military-Locals

Military